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SUBJECT: ISCI IMAMS PRAISE ARBA'EEN SECURITY IN FRIDAY
SERMONS

Classified By: PolCouns Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b and (d))

¶1. (S) Summary: In their Friday, February 29, 2008, sermons, two leading Islamic Supreme Council for Iraq (ISCI)-affiliated imams paid tribute to the security that marked this year's Arba'een commemorations. At the Buratha Mosque in Baghdad, Sheikh Hamid al-Mu'allah al-Sai'di thanked the people of Karbala for the welcome they extended to the millions of pilgrims who visited the shrine of Imam al-Husayn this year. In his sermon at the al-Husainiyah al-Fatima Mosque in Najaf, Sadr al-Deen al-Qubani also thanked the residents of Najaf, and praised the courage of the Iraqi people for participating in the commemoration. In sharp comments directed at the Arab states, al-Sai'di questioned their overall lack of assistance and continued absence from Iraq. Marking an interesting split between these two members of the ISCI clerical leadership, Al-Sai'di claimed that the Presidential Council was within its rights to veto the Provincial Powers Law (PPL), whereas al-Qubani criticized this move, stating that it went against the will of the people. End Summary.

¶2. (S) In his Friday sermon at the Buratha Mosque in Baghdad, al-Sai'di commended the security forces and the security plan that was instituted for this year's Arba'een commemorations. Al-Qubani also praised the security that marked this year's event. Though this year's commemorations were marred by three attacks, including a suicide bombing that killed over 40 people, overall security was significantly better than in previous years. Both also thanked the people of Karbala for welcoming millions of Iraqis to their city during this period, and the news media, particularly the satellite networks, for their favorable coverage of the event.

¶3. (S) Regarding the visiting Arab League delegation that met with Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zieari and other Iraqi officials last week, al-Sai'di welcomed their efforts toward reconciling the different Iraqi political factions. He also pointedly criticized those Arab states that have been absent from post-war Iraq, claiming that "they complain about the presence of some states, but they do not blame themselves for their absence." Al-Qubani was also openly critical of the Arab states, requesting that they stop sending their terrorists to Iraq.

¶4. (S) Putting a positive spin on Vice President Adil Abd al-Mehdi's recent veto of the Provincial Powers Law, al-Sai'di remarked that returning it to the Council of Representatives (COR) for further revision is completely within the constitutional rights of the Presidential Council and should not be a cause for worry. At the same time, he recognized the importance of this law and of empowering the local governorates.

¶5. (S) In contrast to al-Sai'di, al-Qubani was openly critical of the Presidential Council's veto of the Provincial Powers Law, stating that this law had been passed

by the Council of Representatives (COR) and reflected the will of the people.

¶6. (C) Comment: Al-Sai'di's criticism of the Arab states, coming two days prior to President Ahmadinejad's official visit to Iraq, is revealing. Five years after Iraq's liberation, Arab states still remain conspicuously absent from Iraq.

CROCKER